



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY  
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Leanne Castley MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism in the ACT

**Submission Number: 20**

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Standing committee on Environment, Climate change and Biodiversity  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
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Dear Madam/Sir,

*I apologise for this late submission to the Inquiry.*

### **Inquiry into environmental volunteerism**

#### ***Terms of reference 1: type and nature of volunteerism in the environment sector in the ACT***

Without the contributions of 'environmental' volunteers to those aspects of Canberra-life listed in this section of the Inquiry the city's uniqueness would vanish. The ACT Government would incur significantly higher costs for maintaining the ACT's natural estate. Without community members and individuals 'on the ground' in reserves, Urban Open Space and within every suburban street-scape there would be insufficient data on flora, fauna and invasive species in the territory.

**I would suggest adding to your list those thousands of landholders and gardeners who voluntarily care for the ACT's environment by creating habitats for wildlife and themselves around their homes.** These are the people who live lives immersed in sustained by nature. They take responsibility, as informal volunteers, for keeping their properties free of invasive species, they may grow their own food and/or be part of co-operative enterprises such as community gardens and produce-sharing groups.

*I retired from the ACT Education system over twenty years ago and have volunteered in the ACT's Urban Open Spaces and Canberra Nature Park reserves for over 30 years. I am a member of Ginninderra Catchment Group and an amateur naturalist. As a volunteer, I organised the now-superseded, awareness-raising Weed Swap program for twenty years. During this time, I and our teams have enjoyed and been very grateful for the support, liaison capabilities and empathy of the 'rangers' of TCCS and PCS.*

The key aspect of volunteering as I have experienced and enjoyed its diverse forms is **communication and enjoying engagement with others by sharing observations and experiences in nature:** communicating about nature on site and where and when people are happy to be engaged in learning and sharing observations.

#### ***Terms of reference 2: opportunities to improve environmental volunteerism in the ACT, including encouraging the involvement of young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to improve community stewardship***

There are numerous community-initiated organisations that are raising the profile of nature in our city by providing activities, learning experiences, opportunities for reflection, observation and creativity, practical gardening and the diverse forms of land caring.

The ACT government's role is to nurture, practically support and help with the commensurate funding of these organisations and their activities.

Nature play, engagement with school communities, bringing the curriculum to life through practical activities, outdoor education, outdoor classrooms are all ways by which the profile of nature is and could be further raised.

Systemic change is needed to accommodate disengaged students, those for whom there are no longer jobs and to raise the profile of volunteering. Volunteering gives people the chance to contribute to their community. Volunteering offers purpose and, if learning is achieved, can improve volunteers' employment prospects.

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATION:

**Institute a National Liveable Income Guarantee, or Universal Basic Income process for all who contribute to their communities and Australian society.** The current Federal government cannot understand that millions of Australians and citizens have inadequate incomes under the neo-liberal system. Their policies, particularly those relating to minimal taxes for high income earners, leads to increased inequality.

RECOMMENDATION:

**To improve environmental volunteerism and the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and young people in the ACT I would recommend the establishing of at least four Landcare "institutions" around the territory.**

These would be collaborative ventures between existing schools, CIT – TAFE colleges, universities, existing community groups, government agencies and habitat restoration enterprises.

Each institution would be based on or hosted by an existing publicly owned property currently on the urban fringe. **Restoring properties** towards regenerative farming, rehydrating creeklines and soils, propagating and growing plants suited to each locality's soils, expected climatic conditions and playing significant roles in local food production.

**Through the whole, landcaring-based system, participants would learn about relationships, their own needs and behaviours and humans' integrated relationships with and effects on nature, other species, habitats and the preservation of diverse cultures and heritage.**

***Terms of reference 3: managing relationships between volunteers and their organisations, the ACT Government and the public***

Dissolve the discrepancies and divisions between the ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) and the Transport Canberra & City Services (TCCS) landcare volunteer program.

There is often the perception that programs are imposed on communities by bureaucrats without genuine or adequate consultation with the communities that will be affected or will be involved. Sometimes this means that department are not allocated sufficient resources for genuine consultation processes which, in the case of tree planting, can lead to the death of healthy native trees and reduced interest from community members.

Volunteers are at the forefront of protecting ACT land, waterways through the creation of detailed and erudite submissions against development yet they are very often given inadequate amounts of time for the preparation of these submissions. This and the timing of

due dates around the Christmas and holiday is a deliberate ploy on the part of the ACT government and the planning department.

When representations are made to bureaucrats and ministers the elicited promises are rarely kept. For example, we were assured that communication between government agencies regarding hazard reduction vegetation clearing would be improved and yet we are still waiting.

***Terms of reference 4: current policy or regulatory settings that facilitate and/ impede the work and the involvement of volunteers and volunteer organisations in the ACT***

There are inequalities and divisions between the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and the TCCS landcare volunteer program. The discrepancies between the two services are both inequitable and wasteful of scarce funding. For Example: Permitted chemical use and the use of mechanical equipment is different in the two land tenures yet the volunteers are doing the same work, managing invasive species.

The discrepancies between PCS managed reserves and TCCS managed Urban Open Spaces has arisen due to the original differences in conservation values and proximity to suburban places and the territory's infrastructure systems. For the general public and the native flora and fauna in the places where we volunteer there is no difference in the conservation value of those habitats. They are all valuable to the people and organisms who depend on them.

Landcare volunteers feel far more controlled, regulated and not trusted than is necessary. There are fewer "rangers" for the TCCS system and yet the staff have numerous and diverse groups requiring their liaison, procedural and ecological assistance.

**The Grant system** is far too complex, too much time is spent by volunteers and those who assist them in creating the associated and detailed applications. Deserving environmental projects are pitted against each other and competing when all are needed by the species and habitats they are designed for.

**There should be a national system of adequate and long-term funding allocation per hectare of habitat with loading for areas of special need or natural and cultural significance.**

The federal government has many valuable programs for the environment but often they are tokenistic when the scale of need and the uniqueness of the Australian flora and fauna is taken into account.

The current Federal government expends far more energy on avoiding its responsibilities towards Australia, its species and ecosystems through the EPBC Act than it does in protecting Australia's unique flora, fauna and habitats.

There is inadequate funding for the care and management of the ACT's reserves, the hills and ridges that provide Canberra with its internationally unique setting. A greater proportion of this cost should be borne by the federal government as a symbol of pride in the nation's capital. This would release ACT funds for the care and management of suburban open spaces so that they don't languish with invasive species as is the current

situation. There is no universal civic pride through the ACT's suburbs as is seen in towns and smaller cities throughout the rest of Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Environmental Volunteerism. And, again, my apologies for missing the stated deadline for submissions.

Rosemary Blemings  
Landcare volunteer and group Convenor



12.03.22.